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ducible by reason. To formulate his message is to rob him of his truth. The intellect alone cannot comprehend the mysteries of the spirit,—or what's religion for? Emerson's message was not philosophical, but religious. Professor Woodberry's biography is not religious, but philosophical. By all means let us be grateful for a study so satisfying to the intellect. Let us use it as a chart of the heavens wherein the thoughts of Emerson are set as stars. Let us not forget that it is the stars themselves that have the only real existence and that the cosmography upon whose threads we string them is merely a figment of abstraction.

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

“ABELARD AND HELOISE.”*

WE have heard a good deal of late concerning a general revival of interest in poetic plays which is supposed to be taking place, or about to take place. It cannot be denied that the signs of some such movement have multiplied rapidly during the past year or two. Never have actual attempts to present such plays been so largely encouraged by American theatregoers. The box-office is no longer so emphatic in its verdict against poetry; and the box-office is in the nature of things the court of last appeal. The twenty per cent. of playgoers whom Mr. Gosse some time ago postulated as not disposed to take their theatre simply as a dose of morphia or a glass of champagne, really seems inclined to assert itself. Only a few poetic plays in English have actually been produced so far, and they have not set the world on fire. But they have been worth hearing, and they have been heard with a readiness which speaks well for the future. It means, for one thing, the decline of the closet drama, that melancholy refuge of defeated heroics. The drama is for the stage. Even if you are of those who had rather read a play than see it presented, your interest in it turns upon its actable quality. You simply prefer to be your own stage-manager, your own actor or group of actors, your own scene-painter and property man; and to produce plays for yourself upon the complaisant boards of your own mind. If the play is not fit to be acted the chances are you read it as poetry, not as drama, unless, as sometimes happens, your closet play fills for you a kind of left-handed dramatic function by sug-

* “Abelard and Heloise.” By Ridgely Torrence. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

gesting the true play which it is not. It would be a deplorable thing if so tenuous a relation between English poetry and the stage were to prove their sole relation.

Mr. Ridgley Torrence's "El Dorado," published some years ago, was a play of somewhat dubious type. My own impression was that in spite of its numerous settings (certain to trouble a modern manager with his elaborate methods) the thing was actable. It seemed to me to have a true dramatic vigor of conception and execution: a fine romantic theme, a steadily progressing acting and comparatively few touches of poetry for poetry's sake. This is to say that I found much true poetry in it, since verse had obviously not been chosen as vehicle, but had presented itself as the natural means of expression. The resulting blank verse was of singular merit, not less remarkable for its freedom from Shakespeare and other echoes than for its individual force. Even its most lyrical passages have a breathless intensity which seems to hasten rather than impede the action:

"Her eyes blind me. Her breath bereaves my lips.
Her hands have made mine feeble in her presence.
Her silences have drenched me with all music.
The faintest, tenderest stirring of her voice
Makes mute my own. Her hair has made this desert
A shadowed place alive with bloom. Her brow
Has awed me like some symbol of the sky.—

"The images of seas of fire and snow
Pent in the colors of her blood and flesh,
Drown me." . . .

Poetry like this is not a promise, but an achievement. The dramatic unction of the whole performance led one to feel that it was a true product of inspiration, that it had written itself through Mr. Torrence. Of his "Abelard and Heloise," but now published, this is hardly to be felt. Reluctantly, very reluctantly, I must admit that it seems to me in nearly every respect inferior to its forerunner.

It is evident, to be sure, that it has been written with an eye to stage production. There is a single setting for each of its four acts, and details of practical "business" have been carefully studied. So far as form is concerned the play might be easily presentable. We may speak of it, therefore, as a thing acted, not written. For a heroic drama which takes place before us on a

stage, real or imaginary, the theme is impossible. The Cenci motive is infinitely more eligible, for the tragic figure of the unhappy Beatrice is unmarred by any tinge of pathos. The unmitigated horror of her fate has its own dramatic dignity. The Abelard-Heloise legend, on the other hand, is ruined for dramatic purposes by the character of the catastrophe.

The Tristram-Yseult motive has always seemed to me unfit for treatment as a tragic theme; when the lovers become irresponsible through the adventitious means of a love potion, I cease to be interested in them save as objects of pity. Still, they are human, they are capable of becoming responsible once more. When Abelard ceases to be a man and becomes a thing, I see the pathos of the situation, especially from Heloise's point of view; but so far as tragic interest is concerned he has simply ceased to exist. The element of bathos is, in the end, more strongly felt than the element of pathos. Brutal as the fact may be, it is a fact that since the world began the eunuch has been a thing of scorn even more than a thing of pity.

The first act of the play moves heavily or, at best, with an artificial lightness. The machinery by means of which the desired speaker is brought into the centre of the stage at the convenient moment is unfortunately obvious; and the apparatus of grisettes, students, burghers and other talking supernumeraries creaks somewhat in the working. The intrigue between Abelard, Master of the School of Nôtre Dame, and Heloise, niece of the Canon of Nôtre Dame, is discovered. In the second act Heloise has been remanded to her uncle's villa at Corbeil. Abelard, by his father's death, has become a wealthy noble. He determines to give up his scholarly ambition and marry Heloise. She, believing that he owes himself to the world, refuses, since marriage would debar him from the high preferment which he has a right to expect. The uncle, after ascertaining the amount of Abelard's wealth, urges her to marry him, but she is firm. Abelard sets out for Paris. Fulbert, the Canon, is at this point left alone with three of his henchmen.

FULBERT. Lost! Sixty thousand guilders and the name!

He suddenly beckons to his three henchmen.

Approach!

He points to Abelard's retreating figure.

Mark that pale pestilence going there,

For this disease is all of his infection.

With frantic questioning.

The cure?

A HENCHMAN, *insidiously*. When a man's life is tedious to you, Then end it.

FULBERT. Faugh! That's Mercy's sedative.

He muses, then with fiendish cunning suddenly looks up.
I have it! Ah! The man—but not the life!

He draws the men closer and they whisper together.

And with that the play ends for me, as a play, with a very strong act, which is approached in quality by nothing that comes before or after. There remains the pathos of Heloise's loveless after-life, the unquenched womanhood of her continually crying out for the cold presence of her former lover. In interpreting this single character and situation Mr. Torrence does all that may be hoped for. But the cause and character of her bereavement remain in the end adventitious and unheroic.

Nor can it be said that the poet's style has changed for the better. There is a general air of strain; his metaphors frequently pall before he is done with them, and his metre has a way of being so free as to be crabbed. I am by no means a stickler for the decasyllabic line. For speaking purposes there is much to be said for short lines, and for lines in which a pause takes the place of a syllable. But my ear does revolt at such measures as this, which Mr. Stephen Phillips has made popular:

“Plato out of the air
Will brighten. And royal doom-red Babylon
Rise in the twilight out of a dove's throat.
In a heaved sea-wave you shall see blue Tyre
Built and destroyed again.”

I cling to the notion that proper English blank verse is iambic, not dactylic, and that a perversion of accent such as “out of a dove's throat” ought to be very rarely practised. When it comes to:

“Ah, I am not that dark river itself”—

I find difficulty in recognizing any sort of metre whatever. Yet there are noble lines to be found, and not a few of them; as in one of Abelard's final speeches to Heloise:

“A little longer your unquiet soul
Will swim through its rough dreams, until at last
It beaches on the dawn and finds its path.”

H. W. BOYNTON.